

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Leodegario Polo, 81, retired store bookkeeper,
Kahului and Puunene

"That's hard to survive, you know, because one thing with Filipinos, when they have money, they go to the cash and carry, when they have no more money they go to our store [Maui Filipino Store] for credit. That's the difference, you see. But, uh, that's why very hard to survive. And then beside that, Filipinos, you know, when the parent got store, the children, very hard, they do not wish to take over. They rather work on their own."

Leodegario Polo, Visayan, was born October 4, 1898, in Talibon, Bohol, Philippines. His father was an independent merchant.

Polo completed accounting courses at Cebu Business College in 1918. Soon after, he came to Hawaii and worked at Honokaa Plantation on the Big Island. After completing his three-year contract, Polo went to Honolulu to work as a bookkeeper for Watamull's. Meanwhile, he continued to study accounting and bookkeeping through correspondence courses.

Polo returned to Maui in 1929. He became the bookkeeper for the newly opened Maui Filipino Store in Kahului. This store catered to Filipinos living in the Paia and Puunene camps.

After the store closed in 1935, Polo became the bookkeeper for the Filipino-owned Camp 4 Store in Puunene. At the same time, he worked as assistant accountant for HC&S.

Polo retired in 1972, and today does individual income taxes for clients. He is a member of the Filipino Catholic Organization. He enjoys ballroom dancing.

Tape No. 7-67-1-80 and 7-68-1-80

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Leodegario Polo (LP)

April 18, 1980

Kahului, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Leodegario Polo. Today is April 18, 1980 and we're at his home in Kahului, Maui.

Okay, Mr. Polo, can you tell me first of all, where you were born?

LP: I was born in Talibon, Bohol, Philippines.

WN: What year were you born?

LP: Eighteen ninety-eight, October 4, 1898.

WN: What kind of work was your parents doing?

LP: My parents was doing self-employed commercial, you know, they travel from island to island. They buy products in the other island and they sell to the other islands. Independent merchants you call that.

WN: What kind of things did they sell?

LP: Oh, anything. He buy fish on the other side, he buy products that no more on the other island and then he buy from the other island and sell to the other island that no more. That's their job and then they do also farming. We plant rice--during June we plant rice, we had rice field and that's until he die, you see, he died already.

WN: Did he sell any of the rice that he grew?

LP: No, we do not sell, we just consume for all our own consumption.

WN: Was your father working for a company or was he self-employed?

LP: No, no, self-employed.

WN: Did he have anybody working under him?

LP: No, only the family, all the family.

WN: And, did you help at all, did you help your father do that kind of work?

LP: Yeah, during vacation I helped.

WN: What kind of work did you do when you helped?

LP: I helped plow the field, clear the rice field. And sometimes we make copra, you know, the coconut fruit we make copra, we dry them. Then we sell that.

WN: Who did you sell to?

LP: We sell that to the city, we had a buyer over there--a company that buys all, all the copra.

WN: Do you remember anything else that you folks did?

LP: No, I think it was only that one.

WN: Did your mother work at all?

LP: No, only housewife.

WN: What kind of house did you folks live in?

LP: We have--my house is made of wood--wooden floor, wooden wall and then nipa roof.

WN: What kind of roof?

LP: It is leaves from nipa palms. Almost same as coconut but we weave that--we weave the leaves--and then make into roof. That is the roofing that they use in the Philippines most.

WN: Seems like you folks had big family, huh?

LP: Yeah.

WN: There were six children in the family?

LP: Yeah, we have three brothers and three sister so six in the family altogether.

WN: So the houses in the villages, were they about the same as what you described?

LP: Yeah, the houses in the village, it is located on one small island. Eight miles long and two miles wide and it is about a mile distance from the main island. Bohol is the main island and then this island where I live is inhabited about 200 people.

WN: And what were most people doing on that island, what kind of work?

LP: They have their own piece of land they cultivate and then they go fishing. They are all self-employed people. Nobody works under anybody.

WN: The kind of work that your father did by going to the different islands selling things, were there other people doing that kind of work?

LP: No, not so many. Most of the people that live on that island they do their own land, you know, they cultivate their own land. And the women, they make weaving, they make Panama hats. The industry of the women over there and then they sell that to the city. They sell that to Manila, Cebu, that's the main industry of that island.

WN: How would they sell it, they would go themselves to the city?

LP: Yeah, they go themselves. Sometimes some buyer comes, he goes from house to house and he buys all the finished goods. That's how they live.

WN: Did your mother do that kind of weaving?

LP: Yeah, sometimes my mother do weaving.

WN: When you were young growing up over there, what kind of things did you do for have good fun?

LP: No, nothing mostly. Just help my father on the farm in the morning and just roaming around mostly. (Laughs) And in school time I go school. Over there school open in June.

WN: June until when?

LP: June until March of the following year.

WN: April, May you had your vacation?

LP: Yeah, vacation May and June.

WN: Was that when...

LP: No, April and May is the vacation over there.

WN: Was that when they harvested the rice?

LP: They harvested the rice in November. November, December they harvested the rice.

WN: You said that you went to Cebu Business College?

LP: Yeah.

WN: What made you decide to go into business college?

LP: I want to do accounting. I attended two schools. American High School during the daytime and the evening time Cebu Business College. That is a business school, commercial school. Then High School, I followed the general course in high school. I attended two years in high school.

WN: And then what, after the second year of high school. . .

LP: The second year I still attended. The third year pau, I quit, that's when the time I come here in Hawaii, in the third year.

WN: How come you chose to go into accounting?

LP: Well, that's my, from small time, that's my hobby. Accounting was my hobby when I was small so I followed that until I come here in Honolulu until now.

WN: You said "hobby", does that mean you were good in math or something like that?

LP: Yeah, yeah.

WN: So in 1918 you decided to come to Hawaii?

LP: Yeah.

WN: What made you decide to come here?

LP: I decided to come here in order that I can learn some more of the foreign activities of the foreign countries. Foreign education, in other words, so when I was in the plantations with a signed contract for three years I also took correspondence study in the International Correspondence School. I took bookkeeping and accounting to continue, to finish the one that I took over in the Philippines. And I graduated that in July, 1921. I graduate in the ICS, that's the International Correspondence School. I graduated in accounting and bookkeeping.

WN: When you decided to come to Hawaii were there other reasons why you decided to come besides learning about foreign...

LP: The only thing to come to Hawaii is to learn, have experience of the foreign country and also to save money. Because Hawaii had been renowned for easy money. (Laughs)

WN: How did you find out about Hawaii being like that?

LP: Hawaii was very good during the time, 1918 because the cost of living was very cheap. It ran about ten dollars [a month] per person and then the treatment of labor in the plantation at the time was very different because everything was given free. And then although the salary is only dollar a day plus twenty cents bonus if you work twenty days, you will get ten percent bonus monthly. And you got ten percent yearly if you worked twenty days a month. You would spend only about ten dollars a month and if you work every day of the month you received thirty-five to forty dollars so you can easily save that time. During my three years time in the plantation after three years when I went to Honolulu, I was able to save about \$500 which I used to finance my stay in Honolulu while I was out of job yet.

WN: Did you save the \$500 only from [doing] sugar field work?

LP: Yeah, only from sugar work. At that time hospital is free, fuel is free, electricity is free, house is free, everything is free. Transportation is free and there is no union during that time. You are paid [with] the dollar piece, ten dollar piece, five dollar piece, no such thing as check before. (Laughs)

WN: You were paid in ten dollar. . .

LP: Ten dollar, five dollar and some silver dollar.

WN: You were paid in bills?

LP: In silver, not in paper money. Silver and gold.

WN: How often were you paid?

LP: Every month, once a month.

WN: So, you said that you worked three years at Honokaa [Sugar Plantation]?

LP: Three years to complete my contract from the Philippines.

WN: And, uh. . .

LP: Because if as long as they complete the contract after three years then they can go home free. So I used my transportation free when I go back, when I went home.

WN: When did you go home?

LP: I went home first time in 1927.

WN: Where did you live in Honokaa, what kind of house?

LP: I lived in the plantation camp. It is one house with three people inside, just like three rooms and it is plantation. It belongs to the camp. And that's the house that everything is free, water, light, everything.

WN: What kind of work did you do?

LP: My work is we call it pack mule. I have five mules, small, you know this kind of small mules. I carry cane top, you know this cane pulapula we call that cane top, I transfer from field to different field and then I haul salt from the warehouse and then I will be assigned where to bring that salt. So we are three teams altogether, so that is an everyday we work. No more Sunday, no more nothing. Then we work from 6 [o'clock a.m.] to 6 [o'clock p.m.] and we have no more luna, only the morning time they assign us where we go. So, it is very good job because you only riding on the mule. (Laughs) That's why I can work even every day because no more, not hard, not tired. I use glove, I use this kind legging. So that's very good job, pack mule they call that, no more, that job is no more now, the plantation.

WN: You had to load the mule, too?

LP: Yeah, we had to load. Only the loading takes time, it's a little bit hard because you have to load but up until that then pau. You have to make about five trips, all depends the distance, you know, if it's too far then you make only three trips and then sometimes two trips in the morning, two trips in the afternoon and then finish. Very good job, though. (Laughs)

WN: You worked seven days a week then?

LP: Yes, seven days a week I work.

WN: So you got seven dollars a week then?

LP: Yeah, seven dollars whole week pay. And then, on that camp there were about fifty people and there are some single Filipinos there. And then I opened a night [English] class, three times a week I open and I charge them one dollar one month, you know, how to write, how to speak, you know, the first graders class. So I have about twenty pupils in that and then I got twenty dollars extra every month for the school. And then besides that the gamblers, you know, there are gamblers also, they want to borrow money so I lend them money, I charge them ten percent [interest]. If they borrow ten dollars, when they come back they return eleven dollars.

WN: And most people paid you back?

LP: Yeah, most of them pay back. If they don't pay they cannot borrow again. (Laughs) So those were all the income that I make in the plantation.

WN: Night school, how did you get the idea to teach night school?

LP: Because they wanted to learn. They ask me, most of them they ask me if more better open, teach them, they wanted to write, to learn how to write. So I contact the primary school in Honokaa, I order books, you know, the first grader book so I get and that's why I give them. In other words, first grade. But they learn, some they learn how to talk, some they learn how to write.

WN: So you knew a lot of English because you went to a few years of high school?

LP: Yeah, uh huh.

WN: Was that unusual for people in your village at that time, to go that much high school?

LP: Yeah, no, in the Philippines I never do that, only in Hawaii when I came.

WN: But when you went high school in Philippines. . .

LP: Yeah, I went high school in Philippines. I used to teach the lower grades, suppose we were second year, we will be sent down to teach the primary grades because no enough, no lot of teachers is short. So they used the higher grades to teach the lower one.

WN: Let me go back just a little bit now. You had two years of high school and then you went to Cebu Business College, too.

LP: Yeah, two years.

WN: So, you're pretty well educated and you still decided to come to Hawaii?

LP: Yeah, that's why, yeah. We went, not only me, you know, was five of us in my class. Three of them went to the mainland and then after five years or so and then they came back with a degree, they graduate in the mainland, the self studies. One of them graduated as lawyer and the other one is doctor something so they were going home and then they will take exam in the Philippines, I think they are now lawyers.

WN: How come you never went to the mainland?

LP: I had no intention to go there.

WN: Your night school was three times a week, you said?

LP: Yeah, three times a week.

WN: Where did you folks meet?

LP: We have one empty house in the camp which we used for school. Because I asked permission to the plantation and they said okay. And then that one is free, I pay nothing. Given free by the plantation.

Yeah, to me, during that time, the plantation is very peaceful life during that time because no more union that time. The connection --they have the daily connection of the labor and the plantation. They have closer relation in other words. And then comparing with today's activities on the plantation is higher wages but there is also restrictions on that. Because no more free anything, everything is paid so that is the difference between before and today.

WN: And the money you were saving did you put in any kind of bank?

LP: Yeah, I used to put in the bank when I arrived in Honolulu. And then when I was in Honolulu I did not use my brain and instead of buying house and lot which is very cheap I buy car (laughs) and run around. The first thing I bought is one Buick car, that time and then I paid only the Buick car about \$600 at the time. This kind small Buick, that's the first car I bought in Hawaii, before.

WN: After you finished your three-year contract at Honokaa?

LP: Yeah, I finished in Honokaa.

WN: You went to Honolulu in 1920?

LP: Yeah, 1920, yeah.

WN: What made you decide to go to Honolulu?

LP: Because I want to learn some more and then I want to have employment there to make use of what I had been studying. So when I got my diploma in July of 1921 then I was promoted on the Watanull Store. I was bookkeeper and cashier at that time. In July, 1921 until I leave in 1927. Because that time I went Philippines and then when I come back I did not go back anymore there, I went Maui.

WN: What were your impressions of Oahu, Honolulu?

LP: Well, Honolulu, in the beginning it was good but it was growing so rapidly and it was too crowded in the end, and the climate there was more hot than here in Maui. In Honolulu I weighed only 110

[pounds] never go fat over there. (Laughs) And then, too hot, and then, it become so crowded until it's hard to find any beaches to swim. That's why, that's the reason that I changed, I come to not so crowded place so Maui was the best place at the time.

WN: Where did you live in Honolulu?

LP: I lived in one of the furnished rooms.

WN: In the what room?

LP: Beretania, 339 Beretania [Street], it was completely furnished room, just like hotel. The time very cheap, I paid only ten dollars for the room.

WN: Ten dollars a month?

LP: Yeah, ten dollars a month. Oh no, twenty dollars because two of us. Twenty dollars, each person pay ten dollars. But that includes hot water, includes utilities but not food, food you have to eat outside.

WN: So you got the job at Watamull's, did you know you got the job before you came to Honolulu?

LP: No. I get the job when I was there, I watch the [news]paper. So I applied at Watamull and then first I was accepted as the janitor, then I was promoted to salesman, then from salesman I was promoted to bookkeeper and cashier. Just like assistant manager already because I got the key for the store.

WN: How long were you a janitor?

LP: Janitor only one year. Because one year that was the time I already got my diploma. Not only that, I'm not the one who applied but my boss he happened to go to the framing company, you know, the one who makes frames. He saw my diploma there that I brought [to have a] frame [made]. That's why the next day, following Monday he called me, he said, "I see your name over there, you have a diploma?"

I said, "Yeah".

"Why did you not tell me?

I said, "No, I am satisfied what I'm doing here now".

He said, "More better you take over".

So that time we have Chinese bookkeeper, you know, spare time only so he make him stop and then I take over.

WN: So how come you didn't tell him when you started?

LP: (Laughs) I want to surprise, yeah. So good because you know these people, they trust from the time he give me the key to this store. Just like I own this store, he trust everything, no more suspicion, nothing and he only every day, what he do he only take a glance of the cash book. Because he is also is a doctor of commerce, you know, Watamull was a doctor of commerce. Very smart man. Plenty American they come and ask his advice about business. Every day they come. But he died in 1956 and he had about three children, I think, one boy and two girls. They are now running the store with the mother. He was Hindu, is Indian, Hindu, yeah. Very smart man.

WN: Were other Filipinos working in Watamull's?

LP: Yeah, I hired some, some janitors when I was assistant manager there then I hired Filipino janitors and then salesmen, also. So, when I quit the place there were about two Filipinos, one janitor and one salesman, when I leave the place.

WN: Where was Watamull's located?

LP: Watamull bought house in Manoa Valley. The store was in the Blaisdell Hotel, you know, Blaisdell Hotel, under.

WN: So from your house to the store, how did you get to work every day?

LP: Just walk because not too far. Takes only about ten minutes to walk. From Aala Park to Fort Street.

WN: How much did you get paid when you were working there?

LP: First time I started at fifteen dollars a week and then the time that I leave I got \$1,500 a year. In that time if you worked with these people you just drew every month, then you are paid by the year. How much you drew the whole year and how much is left is credited to your account. Just like you are part owner of the store. So the time I left I got \$1,500 a year.

WN: So how would you compare your work at Watamull's with, say, the plantation work?

LP: Watamull is good but there is no more social security at that time, you see, no more social security, at the plantation you are secured. Because like the pension I'm getting now is from the plantation but if during the time if I stayed with Watamull, no more social security at that time. Social security I think, started in 1921 so I got the advantage by working the plantations, by getting my future pension.

WN: So the pension you are getting now is from your plantation work?

LP: Yeah.

WN: In Maui?

LP: Yeah, in Maui.

WN: But not from...

LP: Not from Watamull, I have no more nothing in Watamull.

WN: What about Honokaa?

LP: Honokaa, no more, too. (Laughs) Oh the only thing I got Honokaa is my free transportation [back to Philippines]. The three years that I work there I got my free transportation.

WN: Let me ask you one more question about Honokaa before we go on, yeah? About how much money did you lend out when you lend money to the Filipinos?

LP: I lend them about \$100 a month. That one they borrow, they return, they borrow, they return. But at the rate of \$100, \$150, I loaned to my pupils.

WN: Oh, just your pupils?

LP: Yeah, just my pupils. I do not loan to other people.

WN: So you loan just for gambling reasons?

LP: (Laughs) Yeah, for emergency, they like gamble little bit and for emergency but they pay good, they borrow, they pay.

WN: Did you lend out only to the people you knew?

LP: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Was is it cash that you lent out?

LP: Yeah, cash, no such thing as check, all cash.

WN: So on the average for one person, how much did you lend out?

LP: Sometimes one month they borrow sometimes fifty dollars because they borrow and then they borrow again. For instance, first time they borrow twenty dollars then they return that then they borrow again twenty dollars so that means forty dollars. That means I make four dollars on that because ten percent [interest], eh? So during my three years life in the plantation I found out it is a good life, peaceful life. Simple and peaceful and no more too much headache. (Laughs)

WN: Seems like you folks all were making the same amount but seems like you were able to save more?

LP: Yeah, uh huh.

WN: Why do you think you were able to save and other people weren't able to?

LP: You mean. . .

WN: I mean, you were able to save \$500 at the plantation. . .

LP: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

WN: But were other people able to save that much?

LP: I don't know, though. I think they just break even. Some that don't gamble, they saved. They saved the bonus, you know, the monthly and yearly bonus, they always save that because the yearly bonus is to be given after one year and sometimes they got \$100 over.

WN: Is this contract work or day work?

LP: Day work. Regardless of contract or day work but they figure on the [number of] days you work. Based on twenty days.

WN: Were you sending money back home to your. . .

LP: At that time, no. I was sending money home when I was in Honolulu. I send to build a house in the Philippines, so that was in 1924 I send money. I start to send money and then my parents were still living that time and they were able to make a house, three bedroom house, they make and cost them only \$1,500. Nice, hardwood and then galvanized roof. When I went home, the house was already finished. Until now, the house still stands because the material is hardwood, hardwood material they used. So, it's still there. My nephew is taking care.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, you left Honolulu in 1927 to go back to the Philippines?

LP: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Why did you go to the Philippines?

LP: I want to take vacation. And while there I stayed almost over one year in the Philippines.

WN: So you left with the intention of coming back to Hawaii?

LP: Yeah, when I find out the condition already there is different, you know, the climate and all the food and everything so I decided to come back. And then I stayed Honolulu for a while and then after that I decided to come here because of the people that came here and opened the business, you know, the Maui Filipino Store, they want me to be the bookkeeper over there.

WN: Seems like you had a good job at Watamull's?

LP: Yeah.

WN: What made you decide to quit?

LP: Because these Filipinos here in Maui they offered me the same pay [as Watumull's] and then with house furnished just to help them out to organize the business.

WN: So when you came back to Maui after spending one year in the Philippines in 1929, were these people that you knew before?

LP: What's that?

WN: Did you know these Filipinos before?

LP: Yeah, I know them in Honolulu because they have a business in Honolulu and they moved here.

WN: What kind of business in Honolulu?

LP: Tailoring. They have a tailor business and then over here they come and then they open the Maui Filipino Store. So when after they opened that then they want me to come down that's why I came here in Maui.

WN: Who were the people that wanted to start this store?

LP: Amboi. A-M-B-O-I, he died already, he went home and he died and then Jose Barona. He died also. Both of the one who promote that is gone. So that store was organized in 1929.

WN: What was your role in helping organize the store?

LP: They organized that store as a corporation and then when the depression came that was in 1936 then we sold that to Maui Shōkai, Next door, you know, Maui Shōkai.

WN: Next door?

LP: Yeah and now Maui Shōkai is already closed. No more.

WN: In talking to somebody with Maui Shōkai, he said that one of the people who started the Maui Filipino Store used to be a salesman for Maui Shōkai?

LP: Yeah, one used to be salesman. [Leocadio] Baldovi. Used to be working for Maui Shōkai and that's why they got the experience. The operation of the business is to take order from different camp. Take order, deliver, take order, deliver. But finally in the long run when the depression came its hard to collect because the account is all credit, you know, credit, no more such thing as cash business, its credit business. So when the depression came its hard to collect. That's why we decide to sell it out and then no more, nothing come back to the stockholder. The money that we got was paid to the account, then we just break even.

WN: This Maui Filipino Store was located in Kahului?

LP: Kahului, Puunene Avenue. Next to Maui Shōkai.

WN: How much capital was required to start the store?

LP: Not very much, was only \$25,000. That's the only starting capital.

WN: And who owned the property?

LP: The property we leased from the Kahului Railroad. We do not own the land, only the building.

WN: Where did you live when you were working for Maui Filipino Store?

LP: I rent one housing over there. They have a furnished room across Ah Fook [Store], there was some furnished house already near the hotel, Miho Hotel so I used to rent room there. And that was when I was working at the Maui Filipino Store.

WN: Was this in Kobayashi Camp?

LP: No, no, oh yeah, I moved in Kobayashi Camp. I was living in Kobayashi Camp. I was renting one house there because they have empty house at Kobayashi Camp.

WN: Kobayashi Camp was behind the Kobayashi Store?

LP: Yeah, behind.

WN: How big a staff did you folks have, how many workers were working at the store?

LP: In the beginning we have about, we have this Baldovi as manager, and then we have about three salesmen [order takers] and then myself. That's about five people working there because the one who organized they have their own business in Wailuku so they don't bother, they just look around sometimes, the store. So only five people used to work there. Myself, the manager and the three salesmen [order takers].

WN: And where did you get the goods from?

LP: We order from Honolulu. Every month there are some wholesalers, they come. You know, like Hata, Sumida, all the wholesaler in Honolulu they come and take order, then we order.

WN: Did you deal with any of the Maui wholesalers?

LP: Yeah. And sometimes we buy from local, you know, Kahului Store, Maui Dry Goods, they are two wholesalers in Maui before. Now Maui Dry Goods closed out and Kahului Store no more.

WN: So from what time to what time was the store open?

LP: We open from seven [o'clock a.m.] to seven [o'clock p.m.]. Seven in the evening we close and seven o'clock we open. And then no such thing as overtime. We pay the people by monthly.

WN: What was your salary?

LP: My salary at that time was seventy-five dollars and then free house and then the salesmen [order takers] they got sixty dollars.

WN: Can you give me some examples of some of the things you sold in that store?

LP: We sold cold drinks and then tin goods and then drygoods and then, uh, yeah, I think that's all. Sometimes furniture, you know, like folding bed we sell. That's the only thing, no more other things, and groceries. Mostly dry ebi, dry beans, all those we carry.

WN: Any fresh goods?

LP: Fresh goods, no more. Even meat, no more.

WN: Did you sell Filipino food?

LP: No, we no sell Filipino food. Mostly tin goods from Japan we sell and then some dry fish from Japan. Oh yeah, sometimes we sell bagoong, you know, this kind salt fish.

WN: Did you folks make the bagoong?

LP: No, that's already made from Philippines, already made.

WN: And this bagoong you got from the Honolulu wholesalers?

LP: Yeah, we got from Honolulu wholesalers.

WN: You said there were three salesmen to go out and take orders?

LP: Yeah.

WN: About what percentage of your customers took orders and what percentage were drop in kind customers?

LP: Very few drop in customers. Maybe about 10 percent drop in. About 90 percent were take order in their home. I mean, our salesmen go down there take order.

WN: And where did the salesmen go to take orders?

LP: They go all the camp, where plenty camp before. In Puunene we have the Spanish A and the Spanish B. Then we have Camp 7, Camp 6 and then William Camp--McGerrow Camp. All that, because Puunene used to be the biggest camp before so we all do business from there, mostly Puunene and then also Kahului people, they just, we don't have to go down to the house but they come to the store and take order.

WN: What about Paia side?

LP: Paia, one salesman go there in Paia and he only take Paia side. Orpheum Camp because we do not take order far because the expenses, gasoline is too expensive.

WN: Did you folks go mainly to the Filipino houses?

LP: Yeah, mostly Filipino houses.

WN: So how many trucks did you folks have?

LP: We have three trucks.

WN: Now you said that you folks gave a lot of credit?

LP: Yeah, mostly credit, about 90 percent of the business is credit. So it was going good in the beginning but they started to fold when the depression came in 1936. They [the growers] used to throw away all the pineapple and then no can collect the credit outside. Nobody was able to pay because got hard time. So that's why that forced us to sell out the business in 1936. So in other words the business operated from 1929 to 1936.

WN: So about seven years?

LP: Yeah, about seven years.

WN: So as bookkeeper, you had to go deal with the wholesalers, pay them and were you in charge of collecting the money, too? From the customers?

LP: No, only the salesmen but I think I don't know what happened on the uncollected account, you know, when they closed. Oh yeah, we turned it over to one collector with the list of the creditor's accounts that when they collect they pay to the creditors so I don't know what happened to that if our attorney collect or what. Nothing come up in the profit because we turned over the complete list of who owe us and then who we owe. You see, that's the thing.

WN: Did you have trouble paying the wholesalers?

LP: No, we don't have trouble, we pay the wholesalers.

WN: So did you have hard time keeping the books balanced because more people had credit instead of cash?

LP: Oh yeah, because the collection cannot cover the people all the time but that was happening already in 1936. Nineteen thirty-seven, that's when the time the business was given to turn over to Maui Shokai, 1937.

WN: How did your prices compare with other stores?

LP: I think all the other stores they fill out the same during the time because most of the other stores they also closed down. Lahaina, they were also a Filipino store they also closed down, that time. Yeah, most of the business were affected that year in 1936, starting in 1936 but the small business have no more chance to survive.

WN: What was the competition, who was the competition at that time?

LP: The competition, because they only survive is the big capitalist is the one to survive only. But the small no more chance during the time, during the depression time. That's why from the time until now no more Filipino store exist. Because now the only survived is the one that have big capital, you know, like Sears Roebuck, like all these big wholesalers they are the only one, like A&B. But small business has no chance to survive now. Very hard.

WN: When you folks had Maui Filipino Store about how many Filipino-owned stores were there in Kahului and Puunene?

LP: During the time, I think, in Puunene got one store, in Wailuku, got two, in Kahului got one, in Lahaina got two. About seven. Paia got one, about eight different business during the time.

WN: Between 1929 and 1936?

LP: Yeah, about eight Filipino business. Now there is nothing.

WN: So how come, why do you think didn't have too many Filipino businesses?

LP: That's hard to survive, you know, because one thing with the Filipinos, when they have money, they go to the cash and carry, when they have no more money they go to our store for credit. (Laughs) That's the difference, you see. But, uh, that's why very hard to survive. And then beside that, Filipinos, you know, when the parent got store, the children, very hard, they do not wish to take over. They rather work on their own. Like in Wailuku, there was one store over there, Guerrero store, George Guerrero [another interviewee]. He got too many children but they don't want to take over so Guerrero he sold, pau. Not like the Japanese, you know, got the children that are willing to take over any time. That's why no Filipino business survive. So, like me for example, like my son, I like him go take over on this accounting, he don't want. He said too much trouble. (Laughs) Yeah, he is satisfied as manager for one corporation. That place he work now is American corporation so he is only satisfied with that. No more headache, he said. Accounting is too many responsibility for so many people so he don't want. That's why hard, though.

WN: You think Filipino customers were more hard to deal with than, say, Japanese customers?

LP: No, not hard, almost the same.

WN: Did you ever think about going cash and carry, making the store cash and carry?

LP: Yeah, cash and carry, I was intending to open before but I changed my mind because I'm getting older. Too old already to handle business.

WN: But when you were working at Maui Filipino Store. . .

LP: Yeah.

WN: . . .did you ever think about going cash and carry?

LP: Yeah, but cannot survive because the Filipinos mostly depend their income on the monthly income so at that time was very hard. Now I think it's not hard because most people they got paid [more often]. But, to operate cash and carry now and in my age it's too late. So, the only best way now, I'm only taking easy. (Laughs)

WN: So, you folks sold the business in 1936, yeah?

LP: Yeah.

WN: How much did you sell it for, to Maui Shōkai?

LP: I think it was \$5,000. Five thousand, whole thing. Oh yeah, the business was \$5,000 and then Maui Shōkai takes care the liabilities, that's why we just forget all about it because we turn over to Maui Shōkai and we turn him the lease and he take care the liabilities and then take care the asset, that was \$5,000.

WN: Was the store right next door to Maui Shōkai?

LP: Yeah, right next and then he used the building for so many years and then they broke down when the lease expired because it was leased for twenty-nine years, I think, and then after that, twenty-nine years come and then the railroad [Kahului Railroad Company] broke them down.

WN: People like Baldovi and the other people, what did they do after the store closed?

LP: Just like we forget because we had the meeting before the store closed, we asked the stockholder what they want then he said more better give up, turn over, you know, turn over to a trustee, sell the business and let them liquidate themselves. So there was no trouble because we had a meeting before we decide to sell so nobody squwak. We lose the gamble. (Laughs)

WN: Did they have stockholders, too?

LP: Yeah, stockholders. I lose \$500 myself.

WN: As you look at your experience at Maui Filipino Store, what, if you were to do that part all over again, what would you have done differently?

LP: Oh, that kind business I have experience that not so good. Not so bright when you open the credit business. Because when I, compared to the business that I have attend to in Honolulu, in Wataamull, we deal all cash, you see. And then over here it's just the opposite, it's all credit so it is not profitable business. Credit business is not so good so, especially now. The best way to operate business is cash and carry, you know, if you are able to pay the capital. Cash and carry is the best way.

There is a good business aspect also, you know, the Filipino restaurant but you have to have some employees on that. You have to have a cook, good cook because no more decent Filipino restaurant here now. Not one. If you have that, that is good because the other nationalities they like eat Filipino food so that

will clean up every business if you have. What I see first class, you know, clean and out of that. Yeah, a night club and Filipino restaurant combined, Honolulu they have. They draw big business and the tourists. In the evening they have that entertainment, that Filipino folk dances, big business. Because I was attending one time so that one if got in Maui that is the gold mine but you have to need capital about \$50,000 because you have to have a building for that.

WN: But in 1929 not too many people had cars?

LP: No, no, not many people had cars in 1929, 1930, no, not too many.

WN: So the best way is to have salesmen [order takers] to go out?

LP: Yeah, that's the experience I got in business that between cash and carry and credit business.

WN: So after you folks closed the Maui Filipino Store you started at Camp 4 Store?

LP: Yeah.

WN: That was Filipino run, too?

LP: Yeah, that was partnership, Camp 4 Store. So that one was started in 1937, I think, they started that until it was closed. That is a partnership. That was the same [kind of] operation, they take order, you know, but that is only partnership, two owners. That is the store that ran the longest time of the Filipino stores.

WN: Camp 4 Store was Puunene, yeah?

LP: Puunene, yeah, the building was broken down already by the plantation.

WN: In terms of size, how did it compare with Maui Filipino Store?

LP: Oh, it's smaller but in business operation they same as the Maui Filipino Store, you know, they take order, they go to the camp, sell. You know, they carry cold drink and some tin good outside and they sell by cash.

WN: Cash?

LP: Cash, yeah, that's why they survived. They no give credit.

WN: Even when they went out take orders and deliver?

LP: They no deliver they just sell cash outside the camp. They from different camp everyday because they two partner. One partner go out with all the thing inside the truck then the other stay inside. Biltran, he died now. Then Casiano...

WN: Casiano Ilaga?

LP: Ilaga is the one who go outside.

WN: Oh, so he drove truck?

LP: Yeah, he drove truck then he got so many accident after a while the policeman stopped him. (Laughs) That's why they give up the store. The policeman told him he too old to drive, you cannot drive.

WN: So the operation was little different than your Maui Filipino Store?

LP: Yeah, different because Camp 4 is cash. Just like peddling.

WN: Peddling?

LP: Yeah, peddling. The Filipino Store is directly credit, that's the difference.

WN: So Ilaga would go out with the truck and what, ring bell or something?

LP: Yeah, bring cold drink, ice cream and tin goods. He bring and he sell directly cash to the customers and then Graciano is the one who take care the inside.

WN: So Graciano Biltran and Casiano Ilaga?

LP: Yeah, they are two partners. So that store also last a longer time.

WN: About one day about how much would you folks gross?

LP: Sometime he gross about, uh, \$60, \$100, one day. And then they were able to buy cash to the suppliers, they pay cash. They order and they, like bread, they order and cold drink, they order. In other words they have good accounts but one thing that they don't like is that the building was getting too old and too dirty and so the county, they wanted the building demolished so they write to the plantation. So the plantation finally broke them down. Just give notice, thirty days, you know, to Casiano and Biltran because the lease was also expired. So that was the end of the store. Now, nothing but sugar cane over there.

WN: And you were the bookkeeper for that store?

LP: I was the bookkeeper for the store.

WN: Did you work in the store?

LP: No, uh, yeah, I go there once a week. Spend couple hours over there.

WN: What other kind of work did you do at that same time?

LP: Just I take care the records over there. How much they sell, when I go there I go work on the previous month, close out. So every month I used to go there. I just charge them \$25 a month by checking the book.

WN: What kind of truck did Mr. Ilaga drive?

LP: They have this International. I don't know what happened the truck when the plantation broke the building. I think, I don't know if they were able to sell. Anyhow, there was no trouble on that because they no owe no nothing. They no owe nobody on that store so plantation just broke them. So Ilaga is in, you see him by Sevilla Store?

WN: Yeah, he lives above that, yeah?

LP: So he is now Jehovah Witness. He go out and preach about Jehovah. So no more my client, I used to have all this Filipino stores like this. I used to take care them before but now no more, not one.

WN: What would you say of all the Filipino stores you took, what was the best, most successful?

LP: I think, uh, Camp 4 is the one. Camp 4 is one and there is also this Sevilla--Arquero and Sevilla. That was partners before. I used to take care, they were also success but Arquero went to Wake Island and then Sevilla take over so until now Sevilla is still running. I used to be the original bookkeeper on that before and then there was one store in Paia, service station, I forget the name now but that was only run for couple years and then pau.

WN: Had one grocery store, Felipe?

LP: Yeah, Felipe, I did not take care the book. The other one, service station the one I take. Bantilan.

WN: How you spell that?

LP: That's only Bantilan. B-A-N-T-I-L-A-N, Bantilan Service Station. That was only couple years I take care.

WN: About when, about what years?

LP: About 1946, 1947. And then there was one also I take care about couple years, you know this Lope, Lope Ancheta [another interviewee]. Shoemaker. In [Kahului] Shopping Center?

WN: Yeah.

LP: That one I only take care couple years and then pau, he give up. He sold. Yeah, I used to take care about seven different stores. You know, during the years, 1946, 1947 but most of them close out now, no more.

WN: In 1937, you remember a strike, a Filipino strike?

LP: In 1937, yeah.

WN: What do you remember about that strike?

LP: They send them down to one place. They evict them from the plantation. They send them down to by the Maui Dry Goods, where the Hata wholesale now, you know, the new building now?

WN: Yeah.

LP: They send them there and then, I don't know, because what happened after that, though. I think up until that there was some compromise and then the plantation take them back in 1937.

WN: Did Camp 4 Store donate anything to the strikers, do you know?

LP: No, I don't remember if they do. Yeah, I think they did not stay long on the place where they throw them out. They make arrangement to go back to work because they cannot stay long time without work. That was 1937.

WN: So you were bookkeeper for various stores?

LP: Yeah.

WN: Camp 4 Store was from 1937 to about 1972, yeah?

LP: Yeah, 1972.

WN: Did you have any other kind of job?

LP: No more. Except my job in the plantation office.

WN: Oh, what did you do in there?

LP: I am assistant accountant.

WN: HC&S?

LP: Yeah, I take care the social security and then the State tax and Federal withholding tax. I take care all that and then I help also on the payroll, you know, the. . .

END OF SIDE TWO

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LP: That was my job when I started in 1937--to work in the plantation office. Take care of the Federal withholding, social security withholding and then the State tax withholding and then earning record of the employees.

WN: So when the union, ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] came in, 1946, how did that change your. . .

LP: That time the office was not unionized, only the outside. The office is, became union lately only. That was, I don't remember now when. But not the same time as the labor on the field.

WN: When the union came in for the laborers, did that make your job more difficult, anything like that?

LP: No, just the same. But now the office is, they have union in the office so they have more pay now. My salary in the plantation before I started \$60 a month. And when I left in 1961 I got \$375.

WN: A month?

LP: A month.

WN: You left in 1961?

LP: Yeah, 1961 I left. So now, my only job now left is making the income tax return from January to April which I do that I think for the next two years or couple years more because no more limit or I can work as long as I can.

WN: How long have you been doing other people's income taxes?

LP: Since 1925. But now I give up my accounting license because if I continue my accounting license I will be required to attend forty hours a year school, you know, continuing school. My age too old already so no sense, so I give up. The only thing I can do is the tax accounting. So long no accounting work, can. But if I do accounting work like handling big business, that's accounting, I cannot. I give up that in December of 1978. So now I cannot certify any--somebody like apply for new license, like that--I cannot do that now. But the only thing I can is the tax accounting, you know, income tax return. I am free to do that. So that is the only extra job I make since depression time. This one is good because only three months one year. (Laughs)

WN: You have anything else you want to add?

LP: I think that's all.

WN: Thank you very much.

LP: Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW

**STORES and
STOREKEEPERS of
Paia & Puunene, Maui**

Volume I

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